

HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

(U.S. Millions of Dollars)	\$103.6
Public Health	30.6
Economic Reactivation	53.5
Disaster Mitigation	6.6
Education	4.5
Municipal Infrastructure	2.9
Transparency and Accountability	1.0
Food Aid	4.5



Departments of Nicaragua
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

HELPING SECURE NEW MARKETS FOR NICARAGUAN ARTISANS

Esteli, Nicaragua—Erica Nubia Hernandez whirled a thick green liquid in her blender but she wasn't preparing something to drink. Hernandez was making paper. Using Hernandez's home as a base of operations, a group of 11 women in the rural community of La Tunosa are producing decorative paper made from plantain and palm leaves and a type of cactus leaf.

The women recently learned the art of paper making using plant leaves through a USAID-funded project that is being implemented jointly by the Nicaraguan Association of Producers and Exporters of Non-traditional Products (APENN), CARE and Chemonics, a USAID contractor. USAID provides \$270,000 for the light industry and



San Juan de Limay is known for its decorative sculptures carved out of soapstone, mined in nearby mountains.

decorative accessories project for technical assistance in design, quality improvement of products and to help secure new markets. About 100 artisans, including 3 groups of women paper producers, ceramic potters and stone carvers are currently participating in the program.

The idea behind the paper making venture is to teach the women a skill they can use to increase their household incomes. The project provided the women with training and the necessary equipment to begin production. The project will also help with the commercialization of the decorative paper including exporting it to the U.S. and other countries.



A group of women in Esteli learned how to make decorative paper from plant leaves through a USAID project.

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HELPING SECURE NEW MARKETS...

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"Our objective is to have a little extra income," said Hernandez. She explained that her family is still trying to recover from Hurricane Mitch after losing their house and their entire crop.

Nelly Rodriguez is the unofficial leader of the group having mastered the steps of paper making which include boiling cut up leaves to obtain a paste that is then whisked through a blender. Afterwards, the paste is mixed with water and starch. Next it is passed through a mesh mold to spread the solid sediments in sheets. The sheets are then pressed and dried. The decorative paper can be made in all different sizes and the women are using it to make decorative papier-mâché articles.

"In agriculture we are always at risk of losing our crops," said Rodriguez, whose husband is a farmer. "We are lucky when we produce enough just to eat. I am hoping that this paper production will give me a chance to provide more for my family."

USAID is helping another group of artisans in the town of San Juan de Limay with marketing their crafts. San Juan de Limay, also located in the department of Esteli, is known for its soapstone carvings and sculptures but sales of the articles have mainly been limited to national markets. A project consultant is working with the artisans on securing contracts to export their sculptures. By exporting, the sculptors can make up to \$3 more on each piece.



The USAID project provides new designs and marketing assistance to a group of women potters

A big sign on the Pan American highway directs travelers to the small town of Ducualí, in the department of Estelí, where a group of 25 women produce ceramic ware. The advertisement is paying off. On a recent weekday, the sales room set up at the dirt floor workshop had quite a few buyers.

USAID is now helping the women to expand their market by exporting the finely crafted redware.

Recently, a U.S. buyer from Ideal Originals came to view samples of the decorative paper, ceramics and soapstone carvings produced by the Estelí artisans. The buyer was impressed with the quality of craftsmanship and ordered samples valued at approximately \$1,000 to display at a trade show in High Point, North Carolina. The High Point fair, which draws thousands of visitors from across the U.S., will offer the Nicaraguan artisans the opportunity to display their handicrafts and open the door to new markets.



A customer admires redware at the Ducuali workshop. U.S. buyers will have the chance to see the pottery at the High Point Trade Show in North Carolina.

USAID provides \$270,000 for the light industry and decorative accessories project to provide technical assistance in design, quality improvement of products and to help secure new markets. About 100 artisans, including 3 groups of women paper producers, ceramic potters and stone carvers are currently participating in the program.



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